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## The Man From Brodney's

By GEORGE BARR M'UTCHEON

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"Splendid!" was the sudden exclamation of Drusilla's valet. The others looked up, interested. "Say, everybody, Lady Agnes and I have hit upon a ripping scheme. It's great!"

"To better our position?" asked Deppingham.

"Position? What—oh, I see. Not exactly. What do you say to a charity ball, the proceeds to go to the survivors of the plague we're expected to have?"

The princess gave a quick, involuntary look at Chase's face. Browne's tall fellow countryman was now leaning against the rail beside her chair. She saw a look of surprised amusement flit across his face, succeeded almost instantly by a hard, dark frown of displeasure. He waited a moment and then looked down at her with unmistakable shame and disapproval in his eyes.

"We might just as well be merry while we can," Browne was saying. "Think of what the French did at the time of the commune. They danced and died like ladies and gentlemen. And our own forefathers, Chase, at the time of the American Revolution—remember them too. They gave their balls and parties right under the muzzles of British cannon. And Vicksburg—New Orleans, too—in the civil war! Think of 'em! Why shouldn't we be as game and as gay as they?"

"But they were earnest in their distractions," observed Deppingham, with a glance at his wife's eager face. "This could be nothing more than a travesty, a jest."

"Oh, let us be sports," cried Lady Agnes, falling into an Americanism readily. "It may be a jest, but what odds? Something to kill time with."

"I don't like Mr. Browne," whispered Geneva suddenly. Chase did not reply. She waited a moment and then went on. "He is not like Deppingham. Do you understand?"

Lady Deppingham came over to them at that instant, her eyes sparkling.

"It's to be tonight," she said. "A fashionable charity ball—everything except the newspaper accounts, don't you know. Committees and all that. It's short notice, of course, but life may be short. We'll have Arab acrobatics, Persian dances, a grand march, electric lights and absolutely no money to distribute. That's the way it usually is. Now, Mr. Chase, don't look so sour! Be nice, please!" She put her hand on his arm and smiled up at him so brightly that he could not hold out against her. She caught the touch of disapproval in Geneva's glance, and a sharp, quick flash of rebellion came into her own eyes.

"What is a charity ball?" asked Geneva after a moment.

"A charity ball is a function where one set of women sit in the boxes and say nasty things about the women on the floor, and those on the floor say nasty things about the women in the boxes. It's great fun."

"Charity is simply a hallucination, then?"

"Yes, but don't mention it aloud. Mr. Britt is trying with might and main to prove that Bobby and I have hallucinations without end. If I happen to look depressed at breakfast time he jots it down—spells of depression and melancholia do you see? He's a dreadful man."

Saunders was approaching from the lower end of the balcony. He appeared flustered. His face was red and perspiring and his manner distracted.

"Well, Saunders?" said Deppingham as the lawyer stopped to clear his throat obsequiously.

"I have found sufficient food of all descriptions, sir, to last for a month at least," said Saunders in a strained, unnatural voice.

"Have a cigarette, Deppy?" interposed Browne, seeing that something was amiss with Saunders. In solemn order the silver box went the rounds.

Saunders spoke up, as if suddenly recollecting something. "I have to report, sir, that the stock of cigarettes is getting very low. They can't last three days at this rate, sir."

The three men stared at him.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Chase, who could face any peril and relish the experience if he needs be, but who now foresaw a sickening deprivation. "You can't mean it, Saunders!"

"I certainly do, sir. The mint is holding out well, though, sir. I think it will last."

"By George, that is a calamity!" groaned Chase. "How is a man to fight without cigarettes?"

Geneva quietly proffered the one she had not lighted, a quizzical smile in her eyes.

"My contribution to the cause," she said gayly. "What strange creatures men are! You will go out and be shot at all day and yet—She paused and looked at the cigarette as if it were entitled to reverence.

"It does seem a bit silly, doesn't it?" lamented the stalwart Chase. Then he took the cigarette.

CHAPTER XX.  
THE CHARITY BALL.

THEY were not long in finding out what had happened to Saunders. After luncheon, while Browne and the three ladies were completing the preparations for the entertainment, Miss Pelham appeared before Deppingham and Chase in the former's headquarters. She had asked for an interview and was accompanied by Mr. Britt.

"Mr. Saunders has deceived me," she announced steadily. "I leave it to you if his attentions have not been most pronounced. Of course, if I wanted to, I could show you a transcript of everything he has said to me in the last couple of months. He didn't know it, but I managed to get most everything down in shorthand. I did it at the risk, too, your lordship, of being considered cold and irresponsible by him. It's most difficult to take conversation without the free use of your hands, I must say. But I've preserved in my own black and white every promise he made and—"

"I'm afraid it won't be good evidence," volunteered her lawyer. "It will have to be substantiated, my dear."

"Please don't call me 'my dear,' Mr. Britt. Never you mind about it not being good evidence. Thomas Saunders won't enjoy hearing it read in court just the same. What I want to ask of you, Lord Deppingham, as a friend is to give Mr. Britt your deposition regarding Mr. Saunders' attitude toward me to the best of your knowledge and belief. I'll take it verbatim and put it into typewriting free of charge. I—I don't see anything to laugh at, Mr. Chase!" she cried, flushing painfully.

"My dear girl," he said, controlling himself, "I think you are misjudging the magnitude of a lover's quarrel. Don't you think it is rather a poor time to talk breach of promise with the guns of an enemy ready to take a pop at us at any moment?"

"It's no worse than a charity ball, Mr. Chase," she said severely. "Charity begins at home, gentlemen, and I'm here to look out for myself. No one else will, let me tell you that. I want to get the deposition of every person in the chateau. They can be sworn to before Mr. Bowles, who is a magistrate, I'm told. He can marry people and—"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Deppingham suddenly. "Can he? Upon my soul!"

"His manner changed as soon as that horrid little wife of Selim came to the chateau. I don't like the way she makes eyes at him, and I told him so this morning down in the storeroom. My, but he flew up! He said he'd be—"

"If he'd marry me!" She began to use her handkerchief vigorously. The men smiled as they looked away.

"I intend to sue him for breach of promise," she said thickly.

"Is it as bad as all that?" asked Deppingham consolingly.

"What do you mean by 'bad as all that'?" He kissed me time and again, but that's all."

"I'll send for Saunders," said Deppingham sternly.

"Not while I'm here," she exclaimed. "Just as you like, Miss Pelham. I'll send for you after we've talked it over with Saunders. We can't afford a scandal in the chateau, don't you know."

"No, I should think not," she said pointedly. Then she looked at Chase and winked, with a meaning nod at the unobserving Deppingham. Chase followed her into the hall.

"None of that, Miss Pelham," he said severely.

Saunders came in a few minutes later, nervous and uncomfortable.

"You sent for me, my lord," he said weakly.

"Sit down, Saunders. Your knees seem to be troubling you. Miss Pelham is going to sue you for breach of promise."

"Good Lord!"

"What have you promised her?"

"That I wouldn't marry her; that's all, sir," floundered Saunders. "She's got no right to presume, sir. Gentlemen always indulge in little affairs—flirtations, I might say, sir. It's most common. Of course I thought she'd understand."

"Don't you love her, Saunders?"

"Oh, I say, my lord, that's rather a pointed question, isn't it, sir. There may have been a bit of—er—well, you know—between us, sir, but—that's all, that's quite all, absurdly all, 'pon my soul."

"Saunders," said Britt solemnly, "I am her attorney. Be careful what you say in my presence."

"Britt," said Saunders distinctly, "you are a blooming traitor. You told me yourself that she was used to all that sort of thing and wouldn't mind. Now see what you do! It's—it's outrageous. He was half in tears. Then, turning to Deppingham, he went on fiercely: 'I won't be bullied by any woman, sir. We got along beautifully until she began to shy figurative pots at me because Selim's wife looked at me occasionally. Hang it all, sir, I can't help it if the ladies choose to look at me. Minnie—Miss Pelham—was perfectly silly about it. Good Lord!' he groaned in recollection. 'It was a very trying scene she made, sir. More than ever it made me realize that I can't marry beneath me.'"

"Saunders," said Lord Deppingham sternly, "she loves you. I don't understand why or how, but she does. Just because you have obtained an exalted social position at Hamper Smith Bridge is no reason you should become a snob. I dare say she stands just as well at Brooklyn bridge as you do at Hamper Smith. She's a fine girl and would be an adornment to you such as Hamper Smith could be proud of. If you want my candid opinion, Saunders, I think you're a silly ass!"

"Do you really, my lord?" quite humbly.

(To be Continued.)

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